



National Prescribing Service Limited

MEDIA RELEASE

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Important information about this year's flu shot

If you usually spend winter sniffing and coughing it's time to see your doctor about getting the seasonal flu shot, the National Prescribing Service (NPS) is reminding Australians.

Seniors, people with chronic health conditions and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are at higher risk and should speak to their doctor about a seasonal flu shot even if they are in good health.

"Mid autumn is when anyone at risk of seasonal influenza should be thinking about having a flu vaccine so your body has time to develop immunity to it before winter starts," NPS CEO, Dr Lynn Weekes said.

"The seasonal flu vaccine changes slightly each year as it is designed to treat whichever virus is circulating. Swine flu is still a concern so this year's seasonal flu shot includes protection against it too."

However while flu vaccine protects against influenza it won't stop you catching a cold because they are different viruses.

Common colds are infections of the respiratory tract and usually last 7-10 days. Symptoms can include sneezing, a blocked or runny nose, a sore throat and coughing. If you have green or yellow mucus coming from the nose it's a sign your immune system is fighting the infection – not that the cold is getting worse.

"If you catch a cold there's not a lot you can do. Antibiotics work only on bacteria - they don't work on the viruses that cause common colds, so they won't help common colds get better faster, won't stop cold symptoms getting worse, and won't stop colds spreading to others," Dr Weekes said.

Seasonal influenza, or 'the flu', usually affects people during the winter months from June to September. Seasonal influenza generally starts suddenly with a high fever and you may feel sick enough to go to bed. Symptoms can also include irritation in the throat or lungs, a dry cough, shivering, sweating and severe muscle aches. The flu tends to make the whole body ache, whereas the common cold usually affects the nose and throat only.

The symptoms of swine flu are similar to normal seasonal flu symptoms and most commonly include fever, cough, sore throat, fatigue, body aches, headache and chills.

"If someone in your family develops the flu keep a close watch them and seek medical advice if their condition deteriorates. If they are at greater risk of severe complications they should see their doctor immediately," Dr Weekes said.

Some cold and flu tablets contain paracetamol, aspirin or ibuprofen so if you take them make sure you don't double up by taking any additional pain relief. While cold and flu tablets may relieve the symptoms they don't actually work on the virus and do not change the duration of the cold.

"If you do get a cold or the flu the best thing to do is stay at home, drink plenty of fluids that don't contain caffeine, get lots of rest and take pain relief if you need it for aches and pains."

"If you get worse after about two days, experience different symptoms like vomiting or diarrhea, or have other chronic illnesses you should see your doctor," Dr Weekes advised.

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